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ABSTRACT

The issues, organizational changes, and institutional reactions that colleges and universities perceive as associated with implementation of new marketing practices were identified in a review of the literature and interviews with officials from 25 institutions primarily in or near Los Angeles, California. Several trends were revealed: successful marketing activity will require policy decisions, expended missions, increased expenditures, and centralized administration. It was found that there are emerging trends in institutional change associated with implementation of the marketing concept, and that these cluster into three basic types: those preliminary responses necessary for organizing a marketing effort (i.e., policy decision and expenditures: expected changes that occur as colleges begin to implement the marketing concept: and consequences associated with marketing activity. A marketing program means increased attention to measures of institutional effectiveness, and while significantly contributing to the overall financial stability of the institution, it may bring increased competition among institutions. The most likely areas of expansion as institutions attempt to serve a broader clientele will be to place more emphasis on adult and part-time students. A change in student clientele means changes will need to occur in programs, scheduling, admission requirements, and teaching methods. Ongoing program evaluation can provide the information necessary to make more successful strategic and marketing decisions, and student consumerism may change the priorities for program evaluation. The role of institutional researchers in developing a marketing approach is noted. (SW)

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MARKETING HIGHER EDUCATION MEANS ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Twenty-First Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Leamington Hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 17-20, 1981. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Mary Corcoran
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ABSTRACT

This study identifies the issues, organizational changes, and institutional reactions which colleges and universities perceive as associated with implementation of new marketing practices. A review of the literature and interviews with officials from Los Angeles area institutions reveals several trends. Successful marketing activity will require policy decisions, expanded missions, increased expenditures, and centralized administration. Organizational changes associated with seeking new clientele will be required. A marketing program means increased attention to measures of institutional effectiveness and while significantly contributing to the overall financial stability of the institution, it may also bring increased competition. Institutional researchers could play a key role in developing a marketing approach in the areas of strategic planning, program evaluation, and market research.

INTRODUCTION

As declining enrollments place higher education into a buyer's market, many institutions are aggressively seeking students by increased efforts employing marketing techniques. Reports in the news media of assorted promotional gimmicks designed to attract new students are usually accompanied by a discussion of ethical concerns of what some educators view as a distasteful practice. Nevertheless, all institutions market themselves in the sense of offering something of value in an exchange relationship; some colleges and universities report institutional changes that have accompanied an increased interest in the marketing concept. At this point in time, very little research has been done which attempts to identify the internal implications for organizational change in institutions that have decided to market themselves more aggressively.

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this study was to identify the issues, organizational changes, and institutional reactions which colleges and universities perceive as associated with implementation of new marketing practices. In reviewing over sixty articles and books related to marketing of university services, interviewing prominent educators from many institutions, and observing organizational changes over a five-year period as a marketing consultant, this author has identified several trends associated with marketing activity. This topic has implications for decision-makers considering a marketing approach. Recommendations have suggested areas where the institutional researcher could make significant

contributions to a total institutional marketing effort.

Criteria were developed for the identification of schools where marketing activity in the modern sense was perceived to be in practice. The sample selected consisted of twenty-five institutions, primarily in or near Los Angeles, California. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with college representatives who were in positions allowing them a broad institutional perspective and who were familiar with the marketing concept.

In this study, the managerial definition of marketing offered by Philip Kotler was used. He defines marketing as "the effective management by an organization of its exchange relations with its various markets and publics."[1] The marketing concept manifests itself in the design of programs to meet the needs of students and to achieve the goals of the organization. The marketing view is student-centered rather than program-centered.

The introduction of marketing concepts and practices into the organization can occur in several ways. The most prevalent pattern is an increased effort in the activities that have traditionally been used. In these instances, the director of admissions is going to be asked to work harder; he may be alloted more funds or staff to assist in his efforts. A less common but more dramatic response stems from a general strategic decision by the college administration to recognize marketing as an area of greater potential benefit to the university and, accordingly, to stimulate increased activity.

The findings to be presented in this study show that there

are emerging trends in institutional change associated with implementation of the marketing concept. They cluster into three basic types. First, there are those preliminary responses necessary for organizing a marketing effort, i.e., the policy decisions, expenditures, and organizational design considerations. Second are the expected changes, predicted or observed, that occur as colleges begin to implement the marketing concept. The third category of changes can be viewed as consequences associated with marketing activity. These distinctions are not mutually exclusive; ideally, all changes would be integrated into a total institutional strategic plan.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

Marketing Policy Decisions

At some point early in the process, regardless of how the marketing concept is initiated into the organization, issues will be raised that require policy decisions. This is most likely to occur at the board or presidential level but could also be resolved by the director of admissions at some institutions.[2] The marketing concept must first be understood and accepted by the president and governing board. Until the policy-making group directs marketing activity, there is not likely to be involvement of other college community members in a committment toward marketing of the institution.[3]

Some of the marketing issues which need to be resolved with some formal or informal policy decision are:

- Who will be responsible for the marketing activity?
- How will the marketing mix be implemented?

- How will new programs be created?
- What will the university image be?
- What mediums will be used to advertise or promote?
- How can the institution respond to marketing information?
- How much visibility does the institution want?

New market areas may be opened that will need approval of the governing organization. For example, if a proposal arose at a southern California university to market programs in San Francisco, this would likely call for a policy decision by the governing group. If a significant increase in enrollment resulted from increased marketing effort, policy decisions may need to be made with respect to personnel and expenditures. In sum, an organization's principal marketing policies and strategies are an integral part of the overall strategic plan.[4]

Expanded Missions

Institutional missions may need to be expanded and goals clarified. The institution seeking new students may find that an expanded mission serves its total endeavor. The response may require breaking away from forms, requirements, or customs of a prior age. For example, the Los Angeles Community College District found that the transfer function (general education to assist students to transfer to other institutions for advanced degrees), which had been its primary mission in the past, was being actualized by a low percentage of its students. Many students now in the Los Angeles community colleges come with a specific training purpose in mind and only take a few courses.[5] A marketing approach might include expanding the mission to more fully recognize this fact.

The most likely areas of expansion, and the most evident to date, as institutions attempt to serve a broader clientele will be to place more emphasis on adult and part-time students.[6] Some universities have established separate schools with the expanded mission of serving adult learners. Other areas of likely development are an increased emphasis on post-professional training and on occupational education. Research by Ruyle and Geiselman(1976) shows that colleges offering non-traditional programs are most likely to develop programs that cater to the vocational interests of adults.[7]

Marketing Expenditures Increased

Financial expenditures for market research and promotion will increase. The rising interest of university administrators in marketing has been disproportionately concerned with promotional activity.[8] This includes selling and advertising. A well-balanced marketing program will require market research and the development of new programs, both expensive activities that in the past have been underbudgeted. There will need to be an increased committment of necessary financial resources to make opportunities a reality, which in turn will necessitate assuming a risk in adopting expensive new programs. This risk can be predicted somewhat by carefully planned market research prior to development. Industry spends about 20% of its resources on market research; universities currently spend about 1%. This portion of the university budget is likely to increase if the leadership is serious about expanded marketing.[9]

The most observable influx of funds appears to be directed

toward advertising and promotional activities. Several universities in Los Angeles have more than doubled their advertising expenditures in the last year. One institution which spends large amounts of its budget for advertising is the Extension Division of the University of California, Los Angeles. At one time the most profitable educational institution in the country, UCLA Extension spent 10% to 12% of its total budget in 1974, about one million dollars, on advertising alone.[10] It is not uncommon for small private institutions in the competitive Los Angeles environment to spend as much as 25% of their total revenues on recruitment.

Centralize Marketing Administration

A major change in the organizational structure most often reported or predicted is that of having someone in a centralized position at the upper management level responsible for marketing. At least eleven articles reviewed emphasized the need for a centralized administrative position. The business community long ago recognized this need as many firms have placed specific marketing functions under a single vice-president or director of marketing. The rationale has been the need for coordinating the various elements of marketing with other organizational functions. In the university, this need must be recognized by the president's office as marketing activities are not likely to be conducted unless adequate management responsibility and authority are given to assure sufficient attention.[11] Collaborative leadership strategies seem especially important when considering the internal coordination of the multiple efforts needed to reach potential students.[12]

Philip Kotler, author of Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations,

predicts that "within five years we will see the position of vice-president for marketing in 10% to 15% of our colleges, in substance if not in name."[13] The university's marketing vice-president probably will have a different title. In those institutions interviewed, there was most often a dean of admission, a director of development, or a director of recruitment assigned to this role. Most colleges in the study sample have not yet centralized the marketing function but have it housed in specific departments or schools. Several have used the "marketing task force" approach to get activity and planning off the ground.

Increased attendance at conferences on marketing and the increased use of consultants in this area is an indication of growing interest. Over the past five years there have been an ever larger number of conferences announced in the Chronicle of Higher Education that listed marketing as one of the topics. Several of the institutions interviewed reported that they have either attended a conference on marketing practices or hired consultants to assist them.

IMPLEMENTING THE MARKETING CONCEPT

Organizational Change

To be able to respond on a timely basis to market needs, once they are determined, requires an organization with flexibility. One solution some schools have adopted is to have a small, less formal organization that has the ability to develop programs without the cumbersome burden of department structure or faculty senate approval. University extension and continuing education programs have often provided this responsive model. If any segment

of the university employs marketing techniques, it is likely to be extension.[14] In smaller institutions, it is most often the private liberal arts college that is marketing oriented, and in Los Angeles several community colleges have aggressive marketing programs.

In some cases, it may be necessary to establish an entirely new college to accomodate a new type of clientele. National University, graduating its first class in 1972, was designed to serve the needs of older students exclusively. Now it has become one of the largest private institutions in the State of California. This was the approach taken by the University of Redlands when it established Alfred North Whitehead College to serve working adults in off-campus, evening programs. The primary reason given for the need to establish a separate autonomous organization was the lack of acceptance by the traditional faculty.[15]

There is potential for conflict in building an autonomous unit to be the responsive vehicle to the marketplace. This unit is very likely to become more attractive to potential clientele, increase enrollment and revenue contributions, and invite conflicts with the traditional faculty or staff.

As expenditures for advertising takes money that could be used elsewhere, there will be tension. As the university moves into new fields that faculty have not taught before, there is likely to be resistance and tension. On the other hand, some faculty may increase their effort to participate in applying the marketing concept. Phillip Frandson, Dean of UCLA's Extension Division has recently addressed the problem of political conflicts within his institution.[16] The issue is one of control and the

question is which unit is best able to plan and present the necessary programs, the professional school with its research and graduate teachers or the continuing educators with their needs assessments and practitioners. Disguised in debate over academic quality, the bigger question is who gets the income.

Seeking New Clientele

An institution of higher education that has decided to seek new clientele is most likely to solicit adult, part-time students. By 1980, these older students are expected to account for 40% of the campus population, according to Census Bureau estimates. Educators say the influx reflects a growing inclination of Americans to regard education as a lifelong effort. In the Los Angeles area, the adult is aggressively sought by as many as a dozen institutions, usually small private schools, who have significantly increased their enrollments by appealing to this market segment. Continuing education activities have been developed or expanded at many institutions. Patricia Cross (1978) reported that "most colleges are sincerely trying to serve adult needs; they are spending more money and time to do so.[17] However, the Commission on Non-Traditional Study Report is evidence that many barriers remain to be overcome to provide programs that will meet the needs of this client group.[18]

A change in clientele means changes will need to occur in programs, scheduling, admission requirements, and teaching methods. Faculty and support personnel must understand that they are critical to any successful marketing program. The satisfied student is the key to long-range marketing and faculty members have the

greatest effect upon achieving this goal. Faculty members should be allies in the response-and-serve function, but this usually happens only if they understand the marketing program and see that it is in their best interest.[19]

The role of faculty is likely to remain the same as they approve the nature and content of the academic program. The instructional processes may need to be changed to accomodate the adult student or to compliment innovative delivery systems. Because faculty may be slow to respond, attempting something new may require a new organization with selected staff.[20] Responsiveness to the marketplace may require more part-time faculty which include a greater proportion of practitioners. The majority of the Los Angeles programs attempting to serve the adult student in the off-campus setting employ part-time faculty.

Changes may need to occur in the admissions standards as various new clientele are brought into the system. Older students often have transcripts that contain courses from a past era with grades that require flexible admission policies to accomodate. There is a need to weigh age and experience more heavily in favor of the adult student.

Changes will also need to occur in the scheduling to allow for more flexible academic programming to better service the working adult. Experimentation will need to occur with new programs, short courses, and non-credit offerings for adults.[21]

Reaching Into the Community

As marketing activity increases, there is an increase in efforts to take the university to the consumer by offering courses

off-campus and near the work site. One administrator described the changes at his institution, "The most substantial effect has been that a great number of people on the staff have seen the necessity for a frequent and continuing presence in the field. Faculty have changed their way of living."[22] Indeed, the new external degree programs have proliferated in the Los Angeles market, allowing qualified individuals to get college diplomas without setting foot on campus. Coastline Community College in Orange County is one example of a successful community-based college. In the last several years, Coastline has grown to one of the largest community college systems in the country by expanding the number of sites in order to conduct classes in the local community. Their theme is "Our Campus is the Community".

In this area, universities must re-examine their delivery system and ask, "Is the program or class being offered in the right location?". Time and location may be marketing factors which can give the college a competitive edge for some market segments.

RELATED CONSEQUENCES

Measures of Effectiveness

The business community has a way of keeping score of its effectiveness, profits. The university has no such convenient reporting or measurement system. It can quantify some of its activities such as degrees granted, research grants received, or faculty-student ratios; but these numbers are not a reliable picture of how well the institution has performed. There is also great difficulty in measuring the performance of individual faculty members.[23]

On-going program evaluation can provide the information necessary to make more successful strategic and marketing decisions. As resources become increasingly scarce over the next decade, the need for greater cost-efficiency will grow and there may be less inclination for colleges to attempt new programs. Strategic planning will call for weeding out of unproductive programs and direct-costing of programs will assist in the evaluation to keep a program or cancel it.[24]

Student consumerism may change the priorities for program evaluation. Complaints about the lack of information concerning the "outcomes" of education have begun to appear in the courts, especially directed at proprietary vocational schools. Consumer advocates are becoming increasingly vocal about the need for information.[25] Of those colleges interviewed, none boasted of their ability to specify outcomes; several mentioned attention to the career opportunities that were made available to their students as a result of academic preparation, but information on institutional success was generally lacking.

Now that the university is going to the public, the position has changed relative to the consumer. The new emphasis on "consumer protection" may be seen as another form of accountability which may significantly alter the student-institution relationship in higher education. Efforts have been launched to encourage colleges to provide accurate information to prospective students. In 1976, Congress adopted education amendments, which included student consumer information provisions. Deliberate intent to misrepresent is not necessary; unfairness can occur when colleges

fail to provide information needed to help students make the best choices.[26]

Financial Stability

A marketing program can add more stability to the enrollment figures and financial structure of the university. Enrollment decreases of 10% to 20% are projected in higher education over the next ten years, a fact that could change the entire direction of the institution and impact its fiscal stability.[27]

Several institutions have filled the undergraduate enrollment gap with part-time, adult students for a rather satisfactory financial return. At the University of Redlands, enrollment of adult students increased over the four year period since 1976 when marketing efforts began. Administration was not seeking to extend enrollment figures upward indefinately; the financial goal was stability. Because of marketing results, the university is in a position to reduce efforts to seek enrollments.[28]

Chaffey Community College initiated an aggressive and comprehensive marketing program in 1978. By September of 1980, enrollments had increased 11% over the previous year, reversing a downward trend for the second straight year. With state funding associated with enrollment increases, the district appears in good shape financially.[29]

Pepperdine University's School of Business and Management is another organization which uses marketing strategies heavily, especially advertising. Through successful practices, enrollments have grown to the point where it is now the sixth largest business school in the nation.[30]

Increased Competition

With increased marketing activity and declining availability of traditional clientele, there will be increased competition among institutions of higher education which is most likely to result in greater specialization. In an era in which overbuilt and overstaffed colleges scramble for students, competitive advantage becomes more important. Marketing is instrumental in the development of a school's competitive advantage associated with the need to "position" itself in the educational market.[31]

It is essential that each institution carve out an identity that will distinguish it from its competitors. In the Los Angeles area, Pepperdine University's School of Business and Management has positioned itself as an off-campus program for working adults that offers quality business degrees. This position is backed by an advertising strategy to enhance the image of quality in their business degree programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS

The office of institutional research could play a key role in the adaptation of the organization to a marketing approach. There are at least three critical marketing functions that are directly related to services provided by institutional researchers at some institutions: strategic planning, program evaluation, and market research. Institutional researchers are a luxury that many colleges can not afford; but those institutions that are fortunate enough to have such resources may not be making maximum utilization of the talent available in this office when introducing the marketing concept into the organization.

Strategic Planning

One of the trends in institutional research is to coordinate the activities of this office with institutional planning. Many institutional researchers are already closely tied to the president's office and participate in the strategic planning for the institution. A natural entry point for marketing is to integrate it with the strategic and long-range planning of the organization. Philip Kotler (1979) advocates marketing-oriented institutional planning for non-profit organizations.[32] A marketing plan, including demographics, environmental analysis, mission analysis, and other relevant factors, should be part of the long-range plan. An extensive institutional audit with studies of attrition, forecasting enrollment, retention, no-show studies, and new market research should be standard information for strategic marketing planning.[33]

The traditional institutional research task of coordination and preparation of mandated reports is useful not only for providing marketing information for strategic planning but is also very useful in tracking the effectiveness of the overall marketing program. Information such as student enrollment, weekly student contact hours, and such data provides valuable feedback about what is happening in the institution relative to marketing.[34]

One office of institutional research reports work related to the development of the overall institutional mission statement and objectives. To achieve a mission statement that is relevant to the needs of the community, studies of the university's image were done to see if there was a need to change the image or a better way to present it.[35]

Program Evaluation

A second area of potential contribution to the overall marketing effort which is often a function of the office of institutional research is program evaluation. Dennis Johnson(1972), a leading educational marketing consultant, has written an article entitled "Market Approach Starts with Product Evaluation"[36] suggesting that a starting point for marketing efforts is to take a good hard look at how well the current programs are meeting the needs of the present clientele. As pointed out earlier, there is an increased trend to fully evaluate the current offerings at many of the institutions interviewed. Several schools have very elaborate, systematic evaluation procedures.

While program evaluation is a natural for the institutional researcher who is well trained in the skills of survey research, it is often avoided because of its political sensitivity. The consumer communicates with the institution through evaluation data but administrators and faculty often fail to effectively use this information when making programmatic decisions.

A vital marketing function is providing accurate information about institutional offerings to prospective students. Institutional research people often serve as the archival depository of data concerning the university which is resurrected, as needed, for numerous reports. Several institutions interviewed mentioned the concern for providing accurate descriptive information representing their educational offering and looked to the office of institutional research for this data.[37]

Market Research

A third area of future development for institutional research would be the capability of doing market research to identify new potential markets for the university's services. Institutional research personnel are usually very good in terms of design, execution, and analysis but need to work closely with the marketing professionals to be sure to ask the right questions. Institutional researchers could be doing community needs assessments, image assessments, competition analysis, student satisfaction studies, in addition to the usual demographic data collected. One marketing-oriented office of institutional research reported several "image" studies, attempting to find out what image the college had with local high schools, minority students, mature women, and others.[38]

The office of institutional research has often been given responsibility for the development of management information systems, as more information becomes useful for decision-makers. Unfortunately, most operative management information systems collect information within the system and have little concern for data from the external environment.[39] Studies of the current educational marketplace could be extremely valuable in marketing planning.

There is growing need for market research but institutional researchers often do not feel comfortable initiating a market research project because there may already be another department of the university, the development office or the admissions office, which has such responsibility. This is unfortunate because the people charged with recruiting activity are most often busy in the field and do not have the time, or possibly the skills, to

conduct good market research. Consequently, in many institutions market research is not done at all. Institutional research people could take the initiative, working with the office of the president, to contribute useful market research for strategic planning.

CONCLUSION

The marketing concept suggests that the goals of the institution can be met by focusing upon the needs of students. The choice facing the university is not whether to market or not to market, but whether to do it poorly or professionally. To market well means giving attention to all the marketing functions with a spirit that will inspire the changes within the institution that necessarily follow. Change may be difficult but the possibility of having college classrooms filled with qualified, interested, and goal-oriented students is the exciting reward.

FOOTNOTES

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